

The GREAT
DIVIDE



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THE GREAT DIVIDE



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TORONTO

THE GREAT DIVIDE

A Play in Three Acts

BY

WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1910

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TO
HENRY MILLER
IN GRATITUDE AND FRIENDSHIP
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

PHILIP JORDAN

POLLY JORDAN, *Philip's wife*

MRS. JORDAN, *his mother*

RUTH JORDAN, *his sister*

WINTHROP NEWBURY

DR. NEWBURY, *Winthrop's father*

STEPHEN GHENT

LON ANDERSON

BURT WILLIAMS

DUTCH

A MEXICAN

A CONTRACTOR

AN ARCHITECT

A BOY

ACT I

ACT I

Interior of Philip Jordan's cabin in southern Arizona, on a late afternoon in spring. A large room rudely built, adorned with blankets, pottery, weapons, and sacred images of the local Indian tribes, and hung with trophies of the chase, together with hunting-knives, saddles, bridles, nose-bags for horses, lariats, and other paraphernalia of frontier life. Through a long low window at the back the desert is seen, intensely colored, and covered with the uncouth shapes of giant cacti, dotted with bunches of gorgeous bloom. The entrance door is on the left (from the spectator's standpoint), in a projecting elbow of the room; farther to the left is a door leading to the sleeping-quarters. On the right is a cook-stove, (a cupboard for dishes and household utensils,) and a chimney-piece, over which hangs a bleached cow's-skull supporting a rifle.

At a rude table in the centre sits Philip Jordan, a man of thirty-four, mending a bridle. Polly, his wife, kneels before an open trunk, assisted in her packing by Winthrop Newbury, a recent graduate of an Eastern medical college. Ruth Jordan, Philip's sister, a girl of nineteen, stands at the window looking out.

WINTHROP.

As he hands the last articles to Polly.

What on earth possessed you to bring such a load of duds to Arizona?

POLLY.

They promised me a good time, meaning one small shindig — one — in the three months I've spent in this unholy place.

*Philip makes an impatient movement with the bridle ;
speaks gruffly.*

PHILIP.

You'd better hurry. It's getting late.

RUTH.

From the window.

It's getting cooler, which is more to the point. We can make the railroad easily by sunrise, with this delicious breeze blowing.

POLLY.

Gives the finishing touches to the trunk and locks the lid.

There, at last! Heaven help the contents.

PHILIP.

Gruffly, as he rises.

Give me a lift with the trunk, Win.

They carry the trunk outside. Polly, with the aid of a cracked mirror, puts on her travelling hat and cloak.

RUTH.

My, Pollikins! You'll be the talk of all the jack-rabbits and sage hens between here and the railroad.

POLLY.

Phil is furious at me for going, and it is rather mean to sneak off for a visit in a grand house in San Francisco, when you poor dears have to slave on here. But really, I can't endure this life a day longer.

RUTH.

It is n't in nature that you should. Fancy *that* *(she indicates Polly with a grandiose gesture)* nourishing itself on salt-pork, chickory beans, and air-tight!

POLLY.

Do you really mean to say that apart from your pride in helping your brother, making the project

go, and saving the family fortunes, you really *enjoy* yourself here?

RUTH.

Since Phil and I came out, one day has been more radiantly exciting than the other. I don't know what's the matter with me. I think I shall be punished for being so happy.

POLLY.

Punished for being happy! There's your simon-pure New-Englander.

RUTH.

True! I was discovered at the age of seven in the garret, perusing "The Twelve Pillars and Four Cornerstones of a Godly Life."

POLLY.

Pointing at Ruth's heart, speaks with mock solemnity.

If Massachusetts and Arizona ever get in a mixup in there, woe be! — Are you ever going to have that coffee done?

RUTH.

I hope soon, before you get me analyzed out of existence.

POLLY.

As Ruth busies herself at the stove.

The main point is this, my dear, and you'd better listen to what the old lady is a-tellin' of ye. Happiness is its own justification, and it's the sacreder the more unreasonable it is. It comes or it does n't, that's all you can say about it. And when it comes, one has the sense to grasp it or one has n't. There you have the Law and the Prophets.

Winthrop and Philip enter from outside. Ruth, who has set out the coffee and sandwiches on the table, bows elaborately, with napkin over arm.

RUTH.

Messieurs et Mesdames!

WINTHROP.

Coffee! Well, rather, with an all-night ride in the desert ahead of us.

They drink their coffee, Philip standing sullenly apart.

Where do we get our next feed?

RUTH.

With luck, at Cottonwood Wash.

WINTHROP.

And how far may Cottonwood Wash be?

RUTH.

Thirty miles.

WINTHROP.

Sarcastically.

Local measurement?

POLLY.

Poking Philip.

Phil, for Heaven's sake say something. You diffuse the gloom of the Pit.

PHILIP.

I've had my say out, and it makes absolutely no impression on you.

POLLY.

It's the impression on the public I'm anxious about.

PHILIP.

The public will have to excuse me.

POLLY.

I *am* horribly sorry for you two poor dears, left alone in this dreadful place. When Dr. Newbury goes, I don't see how you'll support life. I should like to know how long this sojourn in the wilderness is going to last, anyhow.

During the following, Ruth takes a candle from the shelf, lights it, and brings it to the table. The sunset glow has begun to fade.

RUTH.

Till Cactus Fibre makes our eternal fortune.

WINTHROP.

And how long will that be?

RUTH.

Counts on her fingers.

Two years to pay back the money we raised on mother's estate, two years of invested profits, two years of hard luck and marking time, two years of booming prosperity. Say eight years!

POLLY.

Shades of the tomb! How long do you expect to live?

RUTH.

Forever!

The sound of a galloping horse is heard, muffled by the sand.

WINTHROP.

Listen. What's that?

A boy of fifteen, panting from his rapid ride, appears at the open door.

PHILIP.

Rising and going toward the door.

What's the matter?

BOY.

I've come for the doctor.

PHILIP.

Who wants a doctor?

BOY.

Your man Sawyer, over to Lone Tree. — He's broke his leg.

RUTH.

Broken his leg! Sawyer? Our foreman?

PHILIP.

There 's a nice piece of luck!—How did it happen?

BOY.

They was doin' some Navajo stunts on horse-back, pullin' chickens out of the sand at a gallop and takin' a hurdle on the upswing. Sawyer's horse renigged, and lunged off agin a 'dobe wall. Smashed his leg all to thunder.

Winthrop looks vaguely about for his kit and traveling necessities, while Polly gives the boy food, which he accepts shyly as he goes outside with Philip. Ruth has snatched saddle and bridle from their peg.

RUTH.

I'll have Buckskin saddled for you in a jiffy. How long will it take you to set the leg?

WINTHROP.

Perhaps an hour, perhaps three.

RUTH.

It's a big détour, but you can catch us at Cottonwood Wash by sunrise, allowing three hours for Sawyer. Buckskin has done it before.

She goes out.

POLLY.

Pouting.

This will spoil all our fun! Why can't the creature wait till you get back?

WINTHROP.

Did you ever have a broken leg?

POLLY.

Well, no, not exactly a leg. But I've had a broken heart! In fact, I've got one now, if you're not going with us.

WINTHROP.

To tell you the truth, mine is broken too.

Pause.

Did you ever dream of climbing a long hill, and having to turn back before you saw what was on the other side?

Polly nods enthusiastically.

I feel as if I'd had my chance to-night to see what was over there, and lost it.

POLLY.

You'll excuse me if it sounds personal, Dr. New-

bury, but did you expect to discern a — sort of central figure in the outrolled landscape?

WINTHROP.

Embarrassed, repenting of his sentimental outburst.

No. That is —

POLLY.

With a sweep of her arm.

O, I see. Just scenery!

She laughs and goes into the inner room, left. Ruth reënters. The sky has partly faded and a great full moon begins to rise.

RUTH.

Buckskin is ready, and so is the moon. The boy knows the trails like an Indian. He will bring you through to Cottonwood by daylight.

WINTHROP.

Taking heart.

We shall have the ride back together, at any rate.

RUTH.

Yes. — I would go with you, and try to do something to make poor Sawyer comfortable, but

we have n't another horse that can do the distance.

She holds out her hand.

Good-bye.

WINTHROP.

Detaining her hand.

Won't you make it up to me?

He draws her toward him.

RUTH.

Gently but firmly.

No, Win. Please not.

WINTHROP.

Never?

RUTH.

Life is so good just as it is! Let us not change it.

He drops her hand, and goes out, without looking back.

Polly reënters. The women wave Winthrop good-bye.

POLLY.

Takes Ruth by the shoulders and looks at her severely.

Conscience clear?

RUTH.

Humoring her.

Crystal!

POLLY.

Counts on her fingers.

Promising young physician, charming girl, lonely ranch, horseback excursions, spring of the year!

RUTH.

Not guilty.

POLLY.

Gracious! Then it's not play, it's earnest.

RUTH.

Neither the one nor the other. It's just your little blonde romantic noddle.

She takes Polly's head between her hands and shakes it as if to show its emptiness.

Do you think if I wanted to flirt, I would select a youth I've played hookey with, and seen his mother spank?

Suddenly sobered.

Poor dear Win! He's so good, so gentle and

chivalrous. But — (*with a movement of lifted arms, as if for air*) ah me, he's — finished! I want one that is n't finished!

POLLY.

Are you out of your head, you poor thing?

RUTH.

You know what I mean well enough. Winthrop is all rounded off, a-completed product. But the man I sometimes see in my dreams is — (*pausing for a simile*) — well, like this country out here, don't you know —?

She breaks off, searching for words, and makes a vague outline in the air, to indicate bigness and incompleteness.

POLLY.

Drily.

Yes, thank you. I do know! Heaven send you joy of him!

RUTH

Heaven won't, because, alas, he does n't exist! I am talking of a sublime abstraction — of the glorious unfulfilled — of the West — the Desert.

POLLY.

Lifts Ruth's chin, severely.

We have n't by chance, some spring morning, riding over to the trading-station or elsewhere — just by the merest chance *beheld* a sublime abstraction — say in blue overalls and jumper?

Ruth shakes her head.

Honest?

More emphatic head-shaking. Polly drops Ruth's chin with a shrug of the shoulders. Philip enters.

RUTH.

Putting on her riding-hat.

Is Pinto saddled?

PHILIP.

Pinto is gone.

RUTH.

Astonished.

Gone where?

PHILIP.

To that Mexican blow-out over at Lone Tree. Every man-jack on the ranch has disappeared,

without leave asked or notice given, except this paper which I just found nailed to the factory door.

Ruth takes the note and reads it anxiously. Then she slowly removes her hat and lays it away.

What are you up to now? We've no time to lose!

RUTH.

With quiet determination.

I am not going.

POLLY.

As Philip turns in surprise.

Not going?

RUTH.

I must stay and look after the ranch.

PHILIP.

O, come, that's out of the question!

RUTH.

We have put all mother's money into this venture.
We can't take any risks.

PHILIP.

The men will be back to-morrow. It 's not to be thought of — your staying here all alone.

POLLY.

Seats herself with decision.

One thing is certain: either Ruth goes or I stay.

PHILIP.

Takes off his hat and sets down the provision basket.

That suits me perfectly!

POLLY.

Hysterical.

But I can't stay! I won't stay! I shall go mad if I spend another night in this place.

RUTH.

No, you must n't stay. You would never get us worked up to the point of letting you go, another time.

She lifts Polly, and with arm around her waist leads her to the door.

PHILIP.

I refuse to leave you here alone, just to satisfy a whim of Polly's. That 's flat!

RUTH.

But, Phil, you forget the stores you 're to fetch back. They will be dumped out there on the naked sand, and by to-morrow night —

She blows across her palm, as if scattering thistle down.

PHILIP.

Well, what of it? A few hundred dollars' worth of stuff!

RUTH.

A few hundred dollars means sink or swim with us just now. — Besides, there 's poor Sawyer. He 'll be brought back here to-morrow, and nobody to nurse him. Then inflammation, fever, and good-bye Sawyer.

Philip, with a gesture of accepting the inevitable, picks up the grain-sacks and basket.

POLLY.

At the door, embracing Ruth.

Good-bye, dear. Are n't you really afraid to stay?

RUTH.

I'm awfully sorry to miss the fun, but as for

danger, the great Arizona Desert is safer than Beacon Hill.

POLLY.

You 're sure?

RUTH.

If marauders prowl, I 'll just fire the blunderbuss out the window, and they won't stop running this side of the Great Divide.

POLLY.

Kissing her.

Good-bye, dear.

RUTH.

Good-bye.

Polly goes out.

PHILIP.

Pausing beside Ruth, at the door.

Mind you put out the light early. It can be seen from the Goodwater trail. There's no telling what riff-raff will be straggling back that way after the dance.

RUTH.

Riff-raff! They 're my sworn knights and brothers.

PHILIP.

In that case, what makes you uneasy about the property?

RUTH.

O, property! That 's different.

PHILIP.

Well, you mind what I say and put out the light.

RUTH.

Yours for prudence!

She puts her arm around his waist and draws him to her, kissing him tenderly.

Good-bye, Phil.

He kisses her and starts to go. She still detains him.

When she speaks again, her voice is softened and awed.

What a lovely night! Who would ever think to call this a desert, this moonlit ocean of flowers? What millions of cactus blooms have opened since yesterday!

PHILIP.

Looking at her dubiously.

What 's the matter with you to-night?

RUTH.

Nothing. Everything. Life! — I don't know what 's got into me of late. I 'm just drunk with happiness the whole time.

PHILIP.

Well, you 're a queer one. — Good-bye. I shall get back as soon as horseflesh will do it.

He goes out.

RUTH.

As the rumble of the wagon is heard.

Good-bye! Good-bye, Pollikins! Good-bye!

She takes the candle from the table and stands in the door for a time, then raises the light in one hand and waves her handkerchief with the other. She sets the candle again on the table, goes to the mantel-shelf, and takes down a photograph.

Dear Win! I forgot how disappointed you were going to be.

Pause, during which she still gazes at the picture.

Clear, kind heart!

After a moment she replaces it brusquely on the mantel-shelf, and raises her arms above her head with a deep breath. She stands thus, with arms crossed behind her head, looking at the photograph. Her gaze becomes amused and mischievous; she points her finger at the picture and whispers mockingly.

Finished! Finished!

She begins to prepare for bed, taking down her hair, and re-coiling it loosely during the following. She hums a tune vaguely and in snatches, then with a stronger rhythm; at last she sings.

Heart, wild heart,
Brooding apart,
Why dost thou doubt, and why art thou sullen?
Flower and bird
Wait but thy word —

She breaks off, picks up a photograph from the table, and looks at it for a moment in silence.

Poor little mother! You look out at me with such patient, anxious eyes. There are better days coming for you, and it's troublesome me that's bringing them. Only you trust me!

A man's face appears at the edge of the window, gazing stealthily in. As Ruth turns, he disappears. She lays down the picture and sings again.

*This is the hour,
And thine is the power.
Heart, high heart, be brave to begin it.
Dare you refuse?
Think what we lose!
Think what we gain —*

The words grow indistinct as she takes up the candle and passes into the other room, from which her voice sounds from time to time in interrupted song. The man again appears, shading his face with a peaked Mexican hat so as to see into the darkened room. He turns and waves his hand as if signalling distant persons to approach, then enters through the open door. He looks cautiously about the room, tiptoes to the inner door and listens, then steals softly out, and is seen again at the window, beckoning. Ruth reënters, carrying the candle. She is shod in moccasins, and clad in a loose, dark sleeping-dress, belted at the waist, with wide, hanging sleeves and open throat. As she crosses to the table she sings.

*Heart which the cold
Long did enfold —
Hark, from the dark eaves the night thaw drum-
meth!
Now as a god,
Speak to the sod,
Cry to the sky that the miracle cometh!*

She passes her hand over a great bunch of wild flowers on the table.

Be still, you beauties! You'll drive me to distraction with your color and your odor. I'll take a hostage for your good behavior.

She selects a red flower, puts it in the dark mass of her hair, and looks out at the open door.

What a scandal the moon is making, out there in that great crazy world! Who but me could think of sleeping on such a night?

She sits down, folds the flowers in her arms, and buries her face in them. After a moment she starts up, listens, goes hurriedly to the door, and peers out. She then shuts and bolts the door, draws the curtains before the window, comes swiftly to the table, and blows out the light. The room is left in total darkness. There are muttering voices outside, the latch is tried, then a heavy lunge breaks the bolt. A man pushes in, but is hurled back by a taller man, with a snarling oath. A third figure advances to the table, and strikes a match. As soon as the match is lighted Ruth levels the gun, which she has taken from its rack above the mantel. There is heard the click of the hammer, as the gun misses fire. It is instantly struck from her hand by the first man (Dutch), who attempts to seize her. She evades him, and tries to wrest a pistol from a holster on the wall. She is met by the second man

(Shorty), who frustrates the attempt, pocketing the weapon. While this has been going on the third man (Ghent) has been fumbling with the lamp, which he has at last succeeded in lighting. All three are dressed in rude frontier fashion; the one called Shorty is a Mexican half-breed, the others are Americans. Ghent is younger than Dutch, and taller, but less powerfully built. All are intoxicated, but not sufficiently so to incapacitate them from rapid action. The Mexican has seized Ruth and attempts to drag her toward the inner room. She breaks loose, and flies back again to the chimney-place, where she stands at bay. Ghent remains motionless and silent by the table, gazing at her.

DUTCH.

Uncorking a whiskey flask.

Plucky little catamount. I drink its health.

Drinks.

RUTH.

What do you want here?

DUTCH.

Laughs, with sinister relish.

Did you hear that, Steve?

He drinks again, and reaches out the flask to Ruth.

Take one, and pull in its purty little claws, eh?
Jolly time. No more fuss and fury.

Ruth reaches for a knife, hidden behind the elbow of the chimney. Dutch wrests the knife from her and seizes her in his arms.

Peppery little devil!

With desperate strength she breaks from his clutch and reels from him in sickness of horror. Ghent remains gazing at her in a fascinated semi-stupor. Meanwhile, after closing the door, the Mexican has taken dice from his pocket, and, throwing them into a small vase on the table, shakes them and holds out the vase to Dutch. He takes it and turns to Ghent; the latter has moved a step or two toward Ruth, who in her retreat has reached the chimney-piece and stands at bay.

DUTCH.

Come, get into the game, curse you, Steve! This is going to be a free-for-all, by God!

As he rattles the dice, Ruth makes a supplicating gesture to Ghent.

RUTH.

Save me! save me!

Her gesture is frozen by his advancing towards her. She looks wildly about, shrinking from him, then with sudden desperate resolution speaks.

Save me, and I will make it up to you!

Ghent again advances; she goes on pantingly, as she stands at bay.

Don't touch me! Listen! Save me from these others, and from yourself, and I will pay you—
with my life.

GHENT.

With dull wonder.

With — your life?

RUTH.

With all that I am or can be.

GHENT.

What do you mean? —

Pause.

You mean you 'll go along with me out of this?
Stick to me — on the square?

RUTH

In a tragic whisper.

Yes.

GHENT.

On the dead square?

RUTH.

Yes.

GHEHT.

You won't peach, and spoil it?

RUTH.

No.

Pause, during which he looks at her fixedly.

GHEHT.

Give me your hand on it!

She gives him her hand. The other men, at the table, have drawn their weapons, and hold them carelessly, but alert to the slightest suspicious movement on the part of Ghent.

DUTCH.

As Ghent turns to them.

Shorty and me 's sittin' in this game, and interested, eh, Shorty?

The Mexican nods. Ghent comes slowly to the table, eyeing the two.

Dutch holds out the vase containing the dice.

Shake for her!

GHENT.

Shake how?

DUTCH.

Any damn way! Sole and exclusive rights. License to love and cherish on the premises!

Ghent takes the vase, shakes the dice meditatively, is about to throw, then sets the vase down. He searches through his pockets and produces a few bills and a handful of silver, which he lays on the table.

GHENT.

There 's all I 've got in my clothes. Take it, and give me a free field, will you?

DUTCH.

Leaning over the table to Ghent, in plaintive remonstrance.

You don't mean me, Steve!

GHENT.

To the Mexican.

Well, you, then!

The Mexican spreads the money carelessly with his left hand to ascertain its amount, then thrusts it away with a disgusted grunt of refusal.

DUTCH.

Don't blame you, Shorty! A ornery buck of a dirt-eatin' Mojave 'd pay more 'n that for his squaw.

Ruth covers her face shudderingly. Ghent stands pondering, watching the two men under his brows, and slowly gathering up the money. As if on a sudden thought, he opens his shirt, and unwinds from his neck a string of gold nuggets in the rough, strung on a leather thread.

GHEENT.

Well, it ain't much, that 's sure. But there 's a string of gold nuggets I guess is worth some money.

He throws it on the table, speaking to both men.

Take that, and clear out.

DUTCH.

Draws up angrily.

I 've give you fair warning!

GHEENT.

We 'll keep everything friendly between me and you. A square stand-up shoot, and the best man takes her.

DUTCH.

Mollified.

Now you 're comin' to!

GHENT.

To the Mexican.

Then it's up to you, and you'd better answer quick!

THE MEXICAN.

Eyeing Ghent and Ruth, points to the gun lying on the floor.

I take him, too.

GHENT.

No, you don't. You leave everything here the way you found it.

THE MEXICAN.

Alla right.

He pockets the chain and starts for the door.

GHENT.

Hold on a minute. You've got to promise to tie the man who falls, on his horse, and take him to Mesa Grande. Bargain?

The Mexican nods.

And mouth shut, mind you, or —

He makes a sign across his throat.

THE MEXICAN.

Nods.

Alla right.

He goes out.

GHENT.

Motioning toward the door.

Outside.

DUTCH.

Surprised.

What for?

GHENT.

Sternly.

Outside!

They move toward the door. Dutch stops and waves his hand to Ruth.

DUTCH.

Don't worry, my girl. Back soon.

GHENT.

Threateningly.

Cut that out!

DUTCH.

What 's eatin' you? She ain't yours yet, and I guess she won't be, not till hell freezes over.

He taps his pistol and goes out. Ghent picks up the rifle which has previously missed fire ; he unloads it, throws it on the window-seat, and follows Dutch. Ruth stands beside the table, listening. Four shots are heard. After a short time Ghent appears and watches from the door the vanishing horses. He comes to the table opposite Ruth.

RUTH.

In a low voice.

Is he dead?

GHENT.

No; but he 'll stay in the coop for a while.

She sinks down in a chair. Ghent seats himself at the other side of the table, draws a whiskey flask from his pocket, and uncorks it awkwardly, using only his right hand.

RUTH.

As he is about to drink.

Don't!

GHENT.

Lowers the bottle and looks at her in a dazed way.

Is this on the square?

RUTH.

I gave you my promise.

*Gazing at her, he lets the bottle sink slowly by his side ;
the liquor runs out, while he sits as if in a stupor.
Ruth glances toward the door, and half starts from
her seat, sinking back as he looks up.*

GHENT.

Give me a drink of water.

*She brings the water from a bucket in the corner. He sets
the empty bottle on the table, drinks deeply of the
water, takes a handkerchief from his neck, wets it,
and mops his face.*

GHENT.

Where are your folks?

RUTH.

My brother has gone out to the railroad.

GHENT.

Him and you ranching it here by yourselves?

RUTH.

Yes.

GHENT.

Write him a note.

He shoves paper, pen, and ink before her.

Fix it up anyway you like.

RUTH.

Tell me first what you mean to do with me.

GHENT.

Ponders awhile in silence.

Have you got a horse to ride?

RUTH.

Yes.

GHENT.

We can reach San Jacinto before sun-up. Then we're off for the Cordilleras. I've got a claim tucked away in them hills that'll buy you the city of Frisco some day, if you have a mind to it!

She shrinks and shudders.

What you shivering at?

Ruth does not answer, but begins to write. Ghent, still using only one hand, takes a pistol from his pocket, examines it, and lays it carelessly on the table, within Ruth's reach. He rises and goes to the fireplace, takes a cigarette from his pocket and lights it, and examines the objects on the mantel-shelf. Ruth stops writing, takes up the pistol, then lays it down, as he speaks without turning round.

Read what you 've written.

Ruth, about to read, snatches up the pistol again, rises, and stands trembling and irresolute.

Why don't you shoot?

He turns round deliberately.

You promised on the square, but there 's nothing square about this deal. You ought to shoot me like a rattlesnake!

RUTH.

I know that.

GHENT.

Then why don't you?

RUTH.

Slowly.

I don't know.

GHENT.

I guess you 've got nerve enough, for that or anything. — Answer me; why not?

RUTH.

I don't — know. — You laid it there for me. — And — you have no right to die.

GHENT.

How 's that?

RUTH.

You must live — to pay for having spoiled your life.

GHENT.

Do you think it is spoiled?

RUTH.

Yes.

GHENT.

And how about your life?

RUTH.

I tried to do it.

GHENT.

To do what?

RUTH.

To take my life. I ought to die. I have a right to die. But I cannot, I cannot! I love my life, I must live. In torment, in darkness — it does n't matter. I want my life. I will have it!

She drops the weapon on the table, pushes it toward him, and covers her eyes.

Take it away! Don't let me see it. If you want me on these terms, take me, and may God forgive you for it; but if there is a soul in you to be judged, don't let me do myself violence.

She sinks down by the table, hiding her face in her hands.

O, God have pity on me!

Ghent puts the pistol back into his belt, goes slowly to the outer door, opens it, and stands for some moments gazing out. He then closes the door, and takes a step or two toward the table. As he speaks, Ruth's sobs cease, she raises her head and looks strangely at him.

GHENT.

I've lived hard and careless, and lately I've been going down hill pretty fast. But I have n't got

so low yet but what I can tell one woman from another. If that was all of it, I'd be miles away from here by now, riding like hell for liquor to wash the taste of shame out of my mouth. But that ain't all. I've seen what I've been looking the world over for, and never knew it. — Say your promise holds, and I'll go away now.

RUTH.

O, yes, go, go! You will be merciful. You will not hold me to my cruel oath.

GHENT.

And when I come back?

Ruth does not answer. He takes a step nearer.

And when I come back?

RUTH.

You never — could — come back.

GHENT.

No, I guess I never could.

RUTH.

Eager, pleading.

You *will* go?

GHENT.

For good?

RUTH.

Yes.

GHENT.

Do you mean that?

RUTH.

Wildly.

Yes, yes, ten thousand times!

GHENT.

Is that your last word?

RUTH.

Yes.

Pause. She watches him with strained anxiety.

O, why did you come here to-night?

GHENT.

I come because I was blind-drunk and sun-crazy, and looking for damnation the nearest way. That's why I come. But that's not why I'm staying. I'm talking to you in my right mind now. I want you to try and see this thing the way it is.

RUTH.

O, that is what I want you to do! You did yourself and me a hideous wrong by coming here. Don't do us both a more hideous wrong still! I was in panic fear. I snatched at the first thing I could. Think what our life would be, beginning as we have begun! O, for God's pity go away now, and never come back! Don't you see there can never be anything between us but hatred, and misery, and horror?

GHENT.

Hardening.

We 'll see about that! — Are you ready to start?

Ruth, conscious for the first time of her undress condition, shrinks, and folds her gown closer about her neck.

Go, and be quick about it.

She starts toward her room; he detains her.

Where's your saddle?

She points at it and goes out. Ghent picks up the note she has written, reads it, and stands for a moment in reflection before laying it down. He gets more water from the bucket, drinks deeply, mops his face, and rolls

up the sleeve of his left arm, which is soaked with blood. He tries awkwardly to stanch a wound in his forearm, gives it up in disgust, and rolls down his sleeve again. He reads the note once more, then takes Ruth's saddle and bridle from the wall and goes out. Ruth comes in ; her face is white and haggard, but her manner determined and collected. She comes to the table, and sees the bloody handkerchief and basin of water. As Ghent enters, she turns to him anxiously.

RUTH.

You are hurt.

GHEENT.

It's no matter.

RUTH.

Where?

He indicates his left arm. She throws off her hooded riding-cloak, and impulsively gathers together water, towels, liniment, and bandages ; she approaches him, quite lost in her task, flushed and eager.

Sit down. — Roll up your sleeve.

He obeys mechanically. She rapidly and deftly washes and binds the wound, speaking half to herself, between long pauses.

Can you lift your arm? — The bone is not

touched. — It will be all right in a few days. — This balsam is a wonderful thing to heal.

GHENT.

Watching her dreamily, as she works.

What's your name?

RUTH.

Ruth — Ruth — Jordan.

Long pause.

There, gently. — It must be very painful.

He shakes his head slowly, with half-humorous protest.

GHENT.

It's not fair!

RUTH.

What is n't fair?

GHENT.

To treat me like this. It's not in the rules of the game.

RUTH.

As the sense of the situation again sweeps over her.

Binding your wound? I would do the same service for a dog.

GHEENT.

Yes, I dare say. But the point is, I ain't a dog; I'm a human — the worst way!

She rises and puts away the liniment and bandages.

He starts up, with an impulsive gesture.

Make this bad business over into something good for both of us! You'll never regret it! I'm a strong man!

He holds out his right arm, rigid.

I used to feel sometimes, before I went to the bad, that I could take the world like that and tilt her over. And I can do it, too, if you say the word! I'll put you where you can look down on the proudest. I'll give you the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of 'em.

She covers her face with her hands. He comes nearer.

Give me a chance, and I'll make good. By God, girl, I'll make good! — I'll make a queen of you. I'll put the world under your feet!

Ruth makes a passionate gesture, as if to stop her ears.

What makes you put your hands over your ears like that? Don't you like what I'm saying to you?

RUTH.

Taking the words with difficulty.

Do you remember what that man said just now?

GHEENT.

What about?

RUTH.

About the Indian — and — his squaw.

GHEENT.

Yes. There was something in it, too. I was a fool to offer him that mean little wad.

RUTH.

For — me!

GHEENT.

Well, yes, for you, if you want to put it that way.

RUTH.

But — a chain of nuggets — that comes nearer being a fair price?

GHEENT.

O, to buy off a greaser!

RUTH.

But to buy the soul of a woman — one must go higher. A mining-claim! The kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them!

Breaking down in sudden sobs.

O, be careful how you treat me! Be careful! I say it as much for your sake as mine. Be careful!

GHEENT.

Turns from her, his bewilderment and discomfiture translating itself into gruffness.

Well, I guess we'll blunder through. — Come along! We've no time to lose. — Where are your things?

At her gesture, he picks up the saddle-pack which she has brought out of the bedroom with her, and starts toward the door.

RUTH.

Taking a hammer from the window-ledge and handing it to Ghent.

Fix the bolt. My brother must not know.

He drives in the staple of the bolt, while she throws the blood-stained water and handkerchief into the

fire. He aids her in replacing the weapons on the walls, then takes the saddle-pack and stands at the door, waiting. She picks up her mother's picture, and thrusts it in her bosom. After standing a moment in hesitation, she takes the picture out, kisses it, lays it on the mantei, face down. She extinguishes the lamp, and goes out hastily. He follows, closing the door.

THE CURTAIN FALLS IN DARKNESS

ACT II

ACT II

Stephen Ghent's home, in the Cordilleras. At the right, crowning a rude terrace, is an adobe cabin, stained a pale buff, mellowed to ivory by sun and dust. Over it clamber vines loaded with purple bloom. The front of the cabin is turned at an angle toward the spectator, the farther side running parallel with the brink of a cañon, of which the distant wall and upper reaches are crimsoned by the afternoon light. In the level space before the rocky terrace is a stone table and seats, made of natural rocks roughly worked with the chisel. The rude materials have manifestly been touched by a refined and artistic hand, bent on making the most of the glorious natural background. Against the rocks on the left stands a large hand-loom of the Navajo type, with weaving-stool, and a blanket half woven. On the table lies a half-finished Indian basket, and strips of colored weaving-materials lie in a heap on the ground. Cactus plants in blossom fill the niches of the rocks and lift their fantastic forms above the stones which wall the cañon brink. At one point this wall is broken, where a path descends into the cañon.

Lon Anderson, a venerable-looking miner, with gray hair and beard, sits smoking before the cabin. Burt Williams, a younger man, peeps up over the edge of the cañon, from the path.

BURT.

Hello, Lon. Is the Missus inside?

Lon smokes on, without looking at the questioner.

Look here, I put a nickel in you, you blame rusty old slot-machine. Push out something!

LON.

Removes his pipe deliberately.

What you wantin' off 'n her now? A music lesson or a headache powder?

BURT.

Boss 's waitin' down at the mine, with a couple o' human wonders he 's brought back with him from wherever he 's been this time. Something doin' on the quiet.

LON.

You can tell him his wife ain't nowheres about.

Burt produces an enormous bandana from his pocket, mounts the wall, and waves it. He sits on the wall and smokes for a moment in silence, looking down into the cañon, as if watching the approaching party. He points with his pipe at the cabin.

BURT.

Funny hitch-up — this here one — I think.

LON.

After a pause.

How much you gittin' a day now?

BURT.

Same little smilin' helpless three and six-bits.

LON.

Anything extry for thinkin'?

BURT.

Nope! Threwed in.

They smoke again. Burt glances down to reassure himself, then points at the loom and basket.

Queer business — this rug-weavin' and basket-makin', ain't it? — What d' ye s'pose she wants to sit, day in and day out, like a half-starved Navajo, slavin' over them fool things fur? — Boss ain't near, is he? Don't keep her short of ice-cream sodas and trolley-rides, does 'e?

Lon rises and approaches Burt, regarding him grimly.

Saw 'er totin' a lot o' that stuff burro-back over to the hotel week 'fore last. — An' Dod Ranger — you know what a disgustin' liar Dod is — he tells how he was makin' tests over in the cross-cañon, an' all of a sudden plump he comes on her talkin' to a sawed-off Mexican hobo, and when she sees Dod, she turns white 's a sheet.

LON.

With suppressed ferocity.

You tell Dod Ranger to keep his mouth shet, and you keep yourn shet too — or by Jee — hosopha, I'll make the two of ye eat yer Adam's-apples and swaller the core!

BURT.

O, git down off 'n yer hind legs, Lon! Nobody's intendin' any disrespect.

LON.

You boys keep yer blatherin' tongues off 'n her! Or you 'll get mixed up with Alonzo P. Anderson — (*he taps his breast*) — so 's it 'll take a coroner to untangle ye!

BURT.

Deprecatingly.

I guess I'd stick up fur 'er's quick as you would, come to that.

LON.

Well, we don't need no stickin' up fur 'er. What we need is less tongue.

He leans down and speaks lower.

Especially when the boss is round. You tell the boys so.

*Burt looks at him in surprise and is about to speak ;
Lon makes a warning signal, indicating the approach
of the party below. Burt descends, saluting Ghent
respectfully.*

GHENT.

Peeping up over the edge of the cañon.

Coast clear, eh, Lon?

LON.

Yes, sir.

GHENT.

Where is she?

LON.

Points along the brink of the cañon.

Kind o' think she went out to Look-off Ledge. —
Guess she did n't expect you back to-day.

GHEENT.

Speaking below.

Come up, gentlemen.

Ghent emerges from the cañon, followed by an architect, a dapper young Easterner, and a contractor, a bluff Western type. Ghent is neatly dressed in khaki, with riding-boots and broad felt hat. He has a prosperous and busy air, and is manifestly absorbed in the national game of making money.

Take a seat.

CONTRACTOR.

Sits himself by the table.

Don't care if I do. That new stage of yours just jumped stiff-legged from the go-off. And the trail up here from the mine is a good deal of a proposition for the see-dentary.

ARCHITECT.

As he takes in the stupendous view.

What a wonderful place! Even better than you described it.

GHENT.

Yes. My wife picked it out. — Let's see your plans.

He removes basket from the table, where the architect unrolls several sheets of blue paper.

ARCHITECT.

I have followed your instructions to the letter. I understand that nothing is to be touched except the house.

GHENT.

Not a stone, sir; not a head of cactus. Even the vines you've got to keep, exactly as they are.

ARCHITECT.

Smiling.

That will be a little difficult.

GHENT.

You can put 'em on a temporary trellis. — A little pains will do it.

CONTRACTOR.

Maybe, with a man to shoo the masons off with a shot-gun.

GHENT.

Over the plans.

Provide a dozen men, if necessary, with machine guns.

CONTRACTOR.

As you please, Mr. Ghent. The owner of the Verde mine has a right to his whims, I reckon.

ARCHITECT.

I have designed the whole house in the Spanish style, very broad and simple. This open space where we stand — (*points to the plans*) — I have treated as a semi-enclosed *patio*, with arcaded porches.

GHENT.

Dubiously.

Good.

ARCHITECT.

This large room fronting the main arcade is the living-room.

GHENT.

I guess we'll have 'em all living-rooms. This place is to be lived in, from the word go.

ARCHITECT.

Humoring him.

To be sure, everything cheerful and open. — Here on the left of the inner court is the library and music-room.

GHENT.

I'm afraid we won't have much use for that. My wife don't go in much for frills. I used to play the concertina once, but it was a long while ago.

ARCHITECT.

It can be used for other purposes. For instance, as a nursery, though I had put that on the other side.

GHENT.

Embarrassed and delighted.

Um, yes, nursery. — Stamping-ground for the —?

The architect nods ; the contractor follows suit, with emphasis. Lon nods solemnly over his pipe.

Good.

The architect bends over to make a note with his pencil.

Ghent restrains him and says somewhat sheepishly in his ear.

You can leave it music-room on the map.

ARCHITECT.

Continuing his explanation.

This wing —

Ghent, interrupting him, holds the plan at arm's length, with head on one side and eyes squinted, as he looks from the drawings to the cabin and surroundings.

GHEENT.

Looks a little — *sprawly* on paper. I had sort of imagined something more — more up in the air, like them swell-tepees on the Hill in Frisco.

He makes a grandiose outline of high roofs and turrets in the air.

ARCHITECT.

I think this is more harmonious with the surroundings.

CONTRACTOR.

In answer to Ghent's inquiring look.

Won't look so showy from the new hotel across yonder.

He points to the left, down the curve of the cañon wall.

GHEENT.

What's your estimate on this plan, now you've seen the location?

CONTRACTOR.

It's a long way to haul the stuff. — Say somewhere between twenty and twenty-five thousand. Twenty-five will be safe.

GHENT.

Slightly staggered.

That's a big lot of money, my friend!

CONTRACTOR.

With cold scorn.

I thought we was talkin' about a *house*! I can build you a good sheep-corral for a right smart less.

GHENT.

Well, I guess we don't want any sheep-corral.

CONTRACTOR.

I should think not, with the Verde pumping money at you the way they tell she does.

GHENT.

Holds up the plans again and looks at them in perplexed silence.

I'll tell you, gentlemen, I'll have to consult my

wife about this before I decide. The fact is, I've been working the thing out on the sly, up to now.

CONTRACTOR.

Expect to build it of an afternoon, while the lady was takin' her see-ester?

GHEENT.

I thought I 'd smuggle her off somewhere for a while.

He is silent a moment, pondering.

No! It's her house, and she must O. K. the plans before ground is broke.

He looks along the cañon rim.

Would you mind waiting a few minutes till I see if I can find her? *

He starts irresolutely, then turns back.

Or better still, leave the plans, and I'll see you at the hotel to-morrow morning. I have n't been over there since it was opened. I'd like to know what they're making of it.

CONTRACTOR.

Astonished.

Hain't been over to the Buny Visty yet?

GHENT.

Too busy.

CONTRACTOR.

Well, you 'll find it an up-to-date joint, and chock full of tourist swells and lungers.

GHENT.

Good-afternoon, gentlemen. You 'll excuse me. You can find your way back all right? Take the left-hand path. It's better going.

*The architect bows ceremoniously, the contractor nods.
Ghent disappears along the cañon brink behind the cabin.*

ARCHITECT.

Has been examining the work on the loom, and has then picked up the unfinished basket, admiringly.

What a beautiful pattern! I say, this is like those we saw at the hotel. (*To Lon.*) May I ask who is making this?

Lon smokes in silence; the architect raises his voice, slightly sharp.

May I ask who is making this?

LON.

Benignly.

You kin, my friend, you kin!

ARCHITECT.

Well, then, the question is put.

LON.

And very clear-put, too. You 'd ought to be in the law business, young man.

He gets up deliberately.

Or some other business that 'd take up all yer time.

ARCHITECT.

Between wrath and amusement.

Well, I 'll be hanged!

He follows his companion down the cañon path, stopping a moment at the brink to look round with a professional air at the house and surroundings, then at Lon.

Tart old party!

He descends. Lon crosses to the table, looks over the plans, makes outlines in the air in imitation of Ghent, then shakes his head dubiously, as he rolls up the plans.

Ruth appears, emerging from the cañon path. She wears the same dress as at the close of Act I, with a dark scarf-like handkerchief thrown over her head.

She is pale and exhausted. She sinks on the rocks at the edge of the cañon.

LON.

Approaching her, anxiously.

It's too much fer you, ma'am. You 'd oughter let me go.

He brings her a glass of water from an Indian water-jar before the cabin.

RUTH.

Tasting the water.

O, I thought I should never get back!

She leans against a rock, with closed eyes, then rouses herself again.

Lon, take the glass, and see if you can make out any one down yonder, on the nearer trail. I — I thought some one was following me.

LON.

Speaks low.

Excuse me askin', Mis' Ghent, but is that dod-blamed Mexican a-botherin' you again?

RUTH.

No. He has gone away, for good. It's some one I

saw at the hotel — some one I used to know. — Look if you can make out a man's figure, coming up.

LON.

Takes the glass from the niche in the rocks, and scans the cañon path.

Can't see nothin' but a stray burro, an' he ain't got no figger to speak of. — Might be t'other side o' Table Rock, down in the pinyon scrub.

Ruth gets up with an effort, takes the glass and looks through it, then lays it on the ledge.

Excuse me, ma'am, but — Mister Ghent come home this afternoon.

RUTH.

Startled.

Where is he?

LON.

Huntin' for you down Look-off Ledge way. I 'lowed you was there, not knowin' what else to say.

RUTH.

Thank you, Lon. — You can go now.

He goes down the cañon path. Ruth looks once more through the glass, then crosses to the table, where she

sits down and begins to finger the roll of plans. Ghent reënters. He approaches with soft tread and bends over Ruth. She starts up with a little cry, avoiding his embrace.

You frightened me. — When did you come back?

GHENT.

An hour ago.

RUTH.

Was your journey successful?

GHENT.

Yes. But my home-coming — that looks rather like a failure.

Pause.

I expected to find you out on the bluff.

RUTH.

Lon was mistaken. I had gone the other way.

As she stands at the table, she begins to unroll the plans.

What are these papers?

GHENT.

Have n't you one word of welcome for me, after five days?

Ruth remains silent, with averted head, absently unrolling the packet.

Not a look even?

He waits a moment, then sighs and seats himself moodily by the table.

I never can remember! After I've been away from you for twelve hours, I forget completely.

RUTH.

Forget what?

GHEENT.

How it stands between us. It's childish, but for the life of me I can't help it. — After I've been away a few hours, this place gets all lit up with bright colors in my mind, like — (*searching for a simile*) — well, like a Christmas tree! I dare say a Christmas tree don't amount to much in real life, but I saw one once, in a play, — I was a little mining-camp roust-about, so high, — and ever since it has sort of stood to me for the gates o' glory.

RUTH.

With a hysterical laugh.

A Christmas tree!

She bows her head in her hands, and repeats the words, as if to herself, in a tone in which bitterness has given place to tragic melancholy.

A Christmas tree!

Ghent, watching her moodily, crumples up the plans and throws them upon the ground. He goes toward the cabin, hesitates, turns, and comes back to the table, where Ruth still sits with buried head. He draws from his pocket a jewel-case, which he opens and lays before her.

GHENT.

There is a little present I brought home for you.
And here are some more trinkets.

He takes out several pieces of jewelry and tumbles them together on the table.

I know you don't care much for these things, but I had to buy something, the way I was feeling. And these papers — (*picks them up and spreads them out on the table*) — these mean that you're not to live much longer in a mud shanty, with pine boxes for furniture. These are the drawings for a new house that I want to talk over with you.

He points at the map and speaks glibly, trying to master his discomfiture at her lack of interest.

Spanish style, everything broad and simple! Large living-room opening on inner court. Library and music-room, bless your heart. Bedrooms; kitchen and thereunto pertaining. Wing

where the proprietor retires to express his inmost feelings. General effect sprawly, but harmonious with the surroundings. Twenty thousand estimated, twenty-five limit. Is she ours?

RUTH.

In a dead, flat tone.

How much did you say the house is to cost?

GHENT.

Twenty-five thousand dollars at the outside.

RUTH.

And these — trinkets?

GHENT.

O, I don't know. — A few hundred.

RUTH.

Draws the plans toward her and pours the jewels in a heap upon them from her lifted hands.

Twenty-five thousand dollars and the odd hundreds!

She laughs suddenly and jarringly.

My price has risen! My price has risen!

She laughs again, as she rises from the table and looks down the cañon path.

Keep those displayed to show to our visitors! My honor is at stake.

She points down the path.

There is one coming now!

GHENT.

Visitors? What visitors?

RUTH.

Only an old school-friend of mine; a Mr. Winthrop Newbury.

GHENT.

What are you talking about? Are you crazy?

He joins her, where she stands looking down into the cañon.

This fellow, is he really what you say?

Ruth nods, with unnaturally bright eyes and mocking smile.

What does this mean?

RUTH.

It means that he caught sight of me, an hour ago, in the hotel.

GHENT.

In the hotel? What were you doing there?

RUTH.

With biting calm.

Nothing wicked — as yet. They don't pay twenty-five thousand dollars over there — at least not yet!

Ghent turns sharply, as if stung by a physical blow. She raises her hands to him, in a swift revulsion of feeling.

O, don't judge me! Don't listen to me! I am not in my right mind.

GHENT.

Sweeps the jewels together, and throws them over the cliff.

Do you want me to be here, while you see him?
She does not answer.

Won't you answer me?

RUTH.

Again cold.

Act as you think best.

GHENT.

It's a question of what will be easiest for you.

RUTH.

O, it's all easy for me!

Ghent stands irresolute, then raises his hand in a gesture of perplexity and despair, and goes into the house, closing the door. Winthrop Newbury appears at the top of the cañon path, looks curiously about, catches sight of Ruth's averted figure, and rushes toward her.

WINTHROP.

Ruth! Is it really you?

Ruth starts involuntarily toward him, stretching out her arms. As he advances, she masters herself, and speaks in a natural voice, with an attempt at gayety, as she takes his hand.

RUTH.

Well, of all things! Winthrop Newbury! How did you find your way to this eagle's nest?

WINTHROP.

I — we saw you — we caught a glimpse of you at the hotel, but we were n't sure. We followed you, but lost you in the cañon.

RUTH.

We? Who is we?

WINTHROP.

Your brother and his wife.

RUTH.

Turning the shock, which she has been unable to conceal, into conventional surprise.

Philip and Polly here!

WINTHROP.

They took the other turn, down there where the path forks. We did n't know which way you had gone.

RUTH.

Yes, but why on earth are they here at all?

WINTHROP.

They are on their way East. They stopped over to see me.

RUTH.

To see you? Are you — living here?

WINTHROP.

I have been here only a week.

He starts impulsively, trying to break through the conventional wall which she has raised between them.

Ruth — for God's sake —!

RUTH.

Interrupting him, with exaggerated animation.

But tell me! I am all curiosity. How do you happen to be here — of all places?

WINTHROP.

What does it matter? I am here. We have found you, after all these miserable months of anxiety and searching. O Ruth — why —

RUTH.

I have acted badly, I know. But I wish not to talk of that. Not now. I will explain everything later. Tell me about yourself — about Philip and Polly — and mother. I am thirsty for news. What have you been doing all these months, since — our queer parting?

WINTHROP.

Solemnly.

Looking for you.

Pause.

O Ruth — how could you do it? How could you do it?

RUTH.

Touches him on the arm and looks at him with dumb entreaty, speaking low.

Winthrop!

WINTHROP.

In answer to her unspoken words.

As you will.

RUTH.

Resumes her hard, bright tone.

You have n't told me about mother. How is she?

WINTHROP.

Well. Or she will be, now. Ruth, you ought at least to have written to her. She has suffered cruelly.

RUTH.

Quickly, with a nervous uplift of her arms.

Yes, yes, I know that! — And you are — settled here? You mean to remain?

WINTHROP.

I am physician at the End-of-the-Rainbow mines, three miles below. At least I — I am making a trial of it.

Pause.

How pale and worn you are. — Don't turn away. Look at me.

She flinches, then summons her courage and looks him steadily in the face.

You are — you are ill — I fear you are desperately ill!

RUTH.

Moving away nervously.

Nonsense. I was never better in my life.

She goes toward the cañon brink.

You have n't praised our view. We are very proud of it.

WINTHROP.

Following her.

Yes, very fine. Magnificent.

RUTH.

But you 're not looking at it at all! Do you see that bit of smoke far down yonder? That is the stamp mill of the Rio Verde mine.

WINTHROP.

Compelling himself to follow her lead.

Yes — the Rio Verde. One of the big strikes of the region. Dispute about the ownership, I believe.

RUTH.

None that I ever heard of, and I ought to know. For — (*she makes a sweeping bow*) — we are the Rio Verde, at your service.

WINTHROP.

You — your — husband is the owner of the Verde mine?

RUTH.

No less!

WINTHROP.

Embarrassed.

We found the record of your marriage at San Jacinto. The name was Ghent — Stephen Ghent.

RUTH.

Yes. He will be so glad to see some of my people.

Winthrop's eyes have fallen on the basket at the foot of the table. He picks it up, examines it curiously, and looks meaningly at Ruth, who snatches it from his hand and throws it over the cliff.

A toy I play with! You know I always have to keep my hands busy pottering at some rubbishy craft or other.

WINTHROP.

Is about to speak, but checks himself. He points at the loom.

And the blanket, too?

RUTH.

Yes, another fad of mine. It is really fascinating work. The Indian women who taught me think I am a wonder of cleverness.

WINTHROP.

So do — the women — over there.

He points across the cañon.

RUTH.

Flushing.

Ah, yes, you saw some of my stuff at the hotel. You know how vain I am. I had to show it.

WINTHROP.

Perhaps. But why should the wife of the man who owns the Verde mine *sell* her handiwork, and under such — such vulgar conditions?

RUTH.

Brilliantly explanatory.

To see if it *will* sell, of course! That is the test of its merit.

He looks at her in mute protest, then with a shake of the head, rises and puts on his hat.

WINTHROP.

Do you want to see the others?

RUTH.

Why, yes, to be sure I do. How should I not?

WINTHROP.

You have n't seemed very anxious — these last eight months.

RUTH.

True. I have been at fault. I so dread explanations. And Phil's tempests of rage! Poor boy, he must feel sadly ill-used.

WINTHROP.

He does.

Hesitates.

If there is any reason why you would rather he did n't see you, just now, —

RUTH.

There is no reason. At least, none valid.

WINTHROP.

Then I will bring them up.

RUTH.

By all means.

She holds out her hand, smiling.

Auf wiedersehen!

Winthrop releases her hand and goes toward the cañon path. He waves, and turns to Ruth.

WINTHROP.

They are just below.

As Ruth advances he takes her hand and looks searchingly into her eyes.

For old friendship's sake, won't you give me one human word before they come? At least answer me honestly one human question?

RUTH.

Keeping up her hard, bright gayety.

In the great lottery of a woman's answers there is always one such prize!

WINTHROP.

Dejectedly, as he drops her hand.

It's no use, if that is your mood.

RUTH.

My mood! Your old bugbear! I am as sober-serious as my stars ever let me be.

WINTHROP.

Did you, that night you bade me good-bye, know that — this was going to happen?

RUTH.

Cordially explanatory.

No. It was half accident, half wild impulse. Phil left me at the ranch alone. My lover came, impatient, importunate, and I — went with him.

WINTHROP.

And your — this man — to whom you are married — pardon me, you don't need to answer unless you wish — for how long had you known him?

RUTH.

Solemnly, as she looks him straight in the eyes.

All my life! And for æons before.

He looks at her for a moment, then goes toward the cañon path. Polly's voice is heard calling.

POLLY.

Not yet visible.

Win! Win!

WINTHROP.

Calls down the cañon.

Come up! Come up!

Ruth goes past him down the cañon path. In a moment she reappears, with Polly. They are laughing and talking as they come.

POLLY.

Ruth!

RUTH.

Dear old Polly!

POLLY.

You *naughty* girl!

RUTH.

If our sins must find us out, you are the kind of Nemesis I choose.

POLLY.

My! But you're a shady character. And sly!

Philip appears. Ruth hurries to embrace him, while Polly, fanning herself with her handkerchief, examines the house and surroundings with curiosity.

RUTH.

O Phil! — Dear old man!

She covers his face lightly with her hands.

No scolding, no frowns. This is the finding of the prodigal, and she expects a robe and a ring.

POLLY.

Seating herself on a rock.

Heavens, what a climb! — I'm a rag.

RUTH.

Motions to the men to be seated.

The cabin would n't hold us all, but there's one good thing about this place; there's plenty of outdoors.

WINTHROP.

Looking about.

I should say there was!

POLLY.

To think of our practical Ruth doing the one really theatrical thing known in the annals of Milford Corners, Mass.! — And what a setting! My dear, your stage arrangements are perfect.

RUTH.

In this case Providence deserves the credit. We may have come here to have our pictures taken, but we stayed to make a living.

Philip has drawn apart, gloomy and threatening. Polly keeps up her heroic efforts to give the situation a casual and humorous air.

POLLY.

With jaunty challenge.

Well, where is he?

RUTH.

Who?

POLLY.

He!

Ruth points at the cabin, smiling.

Well, produce him!

RUTH.

Following, with gratitude in her eyes, the key of lightness and raillery which Polly has struck.

You insist?

POLLY.

Absolutely.

RUTH.

O, very well!

She goes up the rocky incline, and enters the cabin, calling: "Steve! Steve!" Polly goes to Philip, and shakes him.

POLLY.

Now you behave!

Indicates Winthrop.

He's behaving.

Ruth reappears in the doorway, followed by Ghent.

RUTH.

With elaborate gayety, as they descend the rocks.

Well, Stephen, since they've run us to earth, I suppose we must put a good face on it, and acknowledge them. — This is Polly, of whom I've talked so much. Polly the irresistible. Beware of her!

Polly shakes his hand cordially.

And this is — my brother Philip.

Ghent extends his hand, which Philip pointedly ignores. Ruth goes on hastily, to cover the insult.

And this is my old school-friend, Winthrop Newbury.

They shake hands.

WINTHROP.

To Philip, formally explanatory.

Mr. Ghent is the owner of the famous Verde mine.

GHENT.

Part owner, sir. I had n't the capital to develop with, so I had to dispose of a half-interest.

WINTHROP.

Is n't there some litigation under way?

RUTH.

Looking at Ghent, surprised.

Litigation?

GHENT.

Yes — a whole rigmarole.

POLLY.

Catching at a straw to make talk.

Heaven help you if you have got entangled in the law! I can conceive of nothing more horrible or ghostly than a court of law; unless (*she glances at Philip*) it is that other court of high justice,

which people hold in private to judge their fellows, from hearsay and half-knowledge!

RUTH.

Keeping up the play desperately, as she blesses Polly with a look.

But there must be law, just the same, and penalties and rewards and all that. Else what's the use of being good?

POLLY.

Like you — for instance!

RUTH.

Well, yes, like me!

POLLY.

You are not good, you are merely magnificent. I want to be magnificent! I want to live on the roof of the world and own a gold mine!

To Ghent.

Show me where the sweet thing is.

GHENT.

We can get a better view of the plant from the ledge below. Will you go down?

Ghent, Polly, and Winthrop go down the cañon path.

Ruth takes Philip by the arm, to lead him after.

PHILIP.

No. We must have a word together, before the gabble begins again. Winthrop has given me your explanation, which explains nothing.

RUTH.

Trying to keep up the light tone.

Has n't that usually been the verdict on explanations of my conduct?

PHILIP.

Don't try to put me off! Tell me in two words how you came to run away with this fellow.

RUTH.

Hardening.

Remember to whom you are speaking, and about whom.

PHILIP.

I got your note, with its curt announcement of your resolve. Later, by mere accident, we found the record of your marriage at San Jacinto — if you call it a marriage, made hugger-mugger at midnight by a tipsy justice of the peace. I don't want to question its validity. I only pray that

no one will. But I want to know how it came to be made, in such hurry and secrecy — how it came to be made at all, for that matter. How did you ever come to disgrace yourself and your family by clandestine meetings and a hedge-row marriage with a person of this class? And why, after the crazy leap was taken, did you see fit to hide yourself away without a word to me or your distracted mother? Though that perhaps is easier to understand!

RUTH.

The manner of your questions absolves me from the obligation to answer them.

PHILIP.

I refuse to be put off with any such patent subterfuge.

RUTH.

Subterfuge or not, it will have to suffice, until you remember that my right to choose my course in life is unimpeachable, and that the man whose destiny I elect to share cannot be insulted in my presence.

PHILIP.

Very well, I can wait. The truth will come out some day. Meanwhile, you can take comfort from the fact that your desertion at the critical moment of our enterprise has spelled ruin for me.

RUTH.

Overwhelmed.

Philip, you don't mean —!

PHILIP.

Absolute and irretrievable ruin.

RUTH.

Then you are going back East — for good?

PHILIP.

Yes.

RUTH.

But — mother's money! What will she do?

Philip shrugs his shoulders.

Is everything gone — everything?

PHILIP.

I shall get something from the sale. Perhaps

enough to make a fresh start, somewhere, in some small way.

RUTH.

Comes to him, and lays her arms on his shoulders.

Phil, I am sorry, sorry!

He caresses her; she bursts into suppressed convulsive weeping and clings to him, hiding her face in his breast.

PHILIP.

Ruth, you are not happy! You have made a hideous mistake. Come home with me.

Ruth shakes her head.

At least for a time. You are not well. You look really ill. Come home with us, if only for a month.

RUTH.

No, no, dear Phil, dear brother!

She draws down his face and kisses him; then lifts her head, with an attempt at lightness.

There! I have had my cry, and feel better. The excitement of seeing you all again is a little too much for me.

PHILIP.

If there is anything that you want to tell me about all this, tell me now.

RUTH.

O, there will be plenty of time for explanations and all that! Let us just be happy now in our reunion.

PHILIP.

There will not be plenty of time. We leave to-morrow morning.

RUTH.

Then you will take me on trust — like a dear good brother. Perhaps I shall never explain! I like my air of mystery.

PHILIP.

Remember that if you ever have anything to complain of — in your life — it is my right to know it. The offender shall answer to me, and dearly, too.

RUTH.

Takes his head between her hands, and shakes it, as with recovered gayety.

Of course they will, you old fire-eater!

PHILIP.

Pointing to the blanket on the loom.

Ruth, at least tell me why —.

Ruth does not see his gesture, as she is looking at the others, who come up from below. The men linger in the background, Ghent pointing out objects in the landscape.

RUTH.

To Polly, who advances.

Well, what do you think of us, in a bird's-eye view?

POLLY.

In a bird's-eye view you are superb!

She draws Ruth to her, and speaks in a lower tone.

And looked at near, you are an enthralling puzzle.

RUTH.

Half to herself.

If you only knew how much!

POLLY.

Taking Ruth by the chin as in Act I.

So you *had* — just by chance — riding over to

the trading-station or so — met the glorious unfulfilled — in blue overalls and a jumper! I thought so!

Ruth bows her head in a spasm of pain. Polly, who does not see her face, goes on teasingly.

I see now what you meant about wanting one that was n't finished. This one certainly is n't finished. But when he is, he 'll be grand!

Ruth moves away with averted head. Polly follows her, peeping round to view her face.

Don't sulk! I meant nothing disrespectful. On the contrary, I'm crazy about him.

In a louder tone.

And now that I've seen the outside of you, I *must* peep into that fascinating little house!

RUTH.

To Ghent, who has drawn nearer.

Polly wants to go inside the cabin. I can't let her until we have shown her what it's going to be.

With Ghent's aid she spreads out the plans, which Polly examines with curiosity.

These are the plans for our new house. You call

us magnificent. We will show you that we are not. We are overwhelming!

WINTHROP.

Looking at his watch.

I am afraid we must be getting back. It grows dark very suddenly in the cañon.

RUTH.

To Polly.

Well, then you may come in, if you will promise to view the simple present in the light of the ornate future.

Polly goes in. Ruth, lingering at the door for an instant, looks back anxiously at the men.

PHILIP.

Curtly, to Ghent.

If you will permit me, I should like a word with you.

GHENT.

Certainly.

Winthrop effaces himself, making and lighting a cigarette, as he looks out over the cañon.

PHILIP.

In deference to my sister's wishes, I refrain from asking you for the explanation which is due me.

Ghent bows in silence.

But there is one thing which I think I am at liberty to question.

GHEENT.

Do so.

PHILIP.

I hear of your interest in a valuable mine. I hear of plans for an elaborate house. Why, then, is my sister compelled to peddle her own handiwork in a public caravansery?

GHEENT.

What do you mean? I don't understand you.

PHILIP.

Points at the loom.

Her rugs and baskets are on sale in the corridor of the hotel, fingered and discussed by the tourist mob.

GHEENT.

Astonished.

This can't be true!

PHILIP.

It is, however.

GHEENT.

I know nothing of it. I've had to be away a great deal. I knew she worked too hard over these things, but I took it for a mere pastime. Perhaps — No, I can't understand it at all!

PHILIP.

I advise you to make inquiries. She has taken pains to conceal her identity, but it is known nevertheless, and the subject of public curiosity.

Polly and Ruth come out from the cabin.

POLLY.

To Philip.

Take me away quickly, or I shall never enjoy upholstery again!

To Ruth.

Please change your mind, dear, and come with us for the night.

RUTH.

No. I will see you in the morning.

WINTHROP.

We leave by the early stage.

RUTH.

Looking at him quickly.

You too?

WINTHROP.

Yes, I have decided so.

RUTH.

I will be there in good time, trust me.

She kisses Polly and Philip.

Good-bye, till morning.

Gives her hand to Winthrop.

Good-bye.

Philip ignores Ghent pointedly in the leave-takings.

Polly bids him farewell with corresponding cordiality.

POLLY.

Good-bye, Mr. Ghent.

As they descend the cañon path, she is heard chatting enthusiastically.

O Phil, you ought to have seen the inside of that delightful little house!

Her voice is heard for some time, indistinctly. Ruth, at the top of the path, waves to them as they descend.

GHENT.

Looks long at her, with deep gratitude.

God bless you!

She sits down on the rocks of the cabin terrace. He walks up and down in anxious thought. Once or twice he makes as if to speak. At length he stops before her.

You must go in and lie down. You are worn out.

RUTH.

Rousing herself.

No, there is something I must tell you first.

GHENT.

Points at the rug.

- It's about this — work you have been doing?

RUTH.

Slightly startled.

You know of that?

GHENT.

Your brother told me. I should have found it out to-morrow anyhow.

Pause.

Have you wanted money?

RUTH.

Yes.

GHENT.

I thought I — I thought you had enough. I have often begged you to take more.

RUTH.

I have n't spent what you gave me. It is in there.
She points toward the house.

GHENT.

Astonished.

You have n't spent — any of it?

RUTH.

A little. Nothing for myself.

GHENT.

But there has been no need to save, not after the first month or two. You surely knew that!

RUTH.

Yes, I knew it. It was not economy.

GHENT.

Slowly.

You have n't been willing to take money from me?

RUTH.

No. I know it was small of me, but I could n't help it. I have paid for everything. — I have kept account of it — O, to the last dreadful penny! These clothes are the ones I wore from my brother's house that night. This shelter — you know I helped to raise that with my own hands. And — and some things I paid for secretly, from the little hoard I brought away with me. You were careless; you did not notice.

GHENT.

Sits down, dizzy from the shock of her words.

I must try to grasp this!

There is a silence, during which he sits perfectly motionless. At last he turns to her.

Why — why did you stand up so plucky, so splendid, just now? Put a good face on everything about our life? Call me by my first name and all that — before your own people?

RUTH.

We are man and wife. Beside that, my own people are as strangers.

GHENT.

Eagerly.

You say that? You can still say that?

RUTH.

Looks up, startled.

Can't you?

She awaits his answer tensely.

GHENT.

Desperately.

O, I don't know. I can't say or think anything, after what you have just told me!

RUTH.

Wails.

You can't say it! And it is n't true! It is we who are strangers. — Worse, a thousand times worse!

GHENT.

Rises and stands over her.

Don't let us dash ourselves to hell in one crazy minute!

He pauses and hesitates. When he speaks again it is with wistful tenderness.

Ruth, do you remember our journey here?

She lifts her head, looking at him with white, thirsty face.

I thought — it seemed to me you had — begun to care for me.

RUTH.

That night, when we rode away from the justice's office at San Jacinto, and the sky began to brighten over the desert — the ice that had gathered here — (*she touches her heart*) — began to melt in spite of me. And when the next night and the next day passed, and the next, and still you spared me and treated me with beautiful rough

chivalry, I said to myself, "He has heard my prayer to him. He knows what a girl's heart is." As you rode before me down the arroyos, and up over the mesas, through the dazzling sunlight and the majestic silence, it seemed as if you were leading me out of a world of little codes and customs into a great new world. — So it was for those first days. — And then — and then — I woke, and saw you standing in my tent-door in the starlight! I knew before you spoke that we were lost. You had n't had the strength to save us!

GHENT.

Huskily.

Surely it has n't all been — hateful to you? There have been times, since that. — The afternoon we climbed up here. The day we made the table; the day we planted the vines.

RUTH.

In a half whisper.

Yes! — Beautiful days!

She puts her hands suddenly before her face and sobs.

O, it was not my fault! I have struggled against it. You don't know how I have struggled!

GHENT.

Against what? Struggled against what?

RUTH.

Against the hateful image you had raised up
beside your own image.

GHENT.

What do you mean?

RUTH.

I mean that sometimes — often — when you stand
there before my eyes, you fade away, and in your
place I see — the Other One!

GHENT.

Speak plainly, for God's sake! I don't under-
stand this talk.

RUTH.

*Looking steadfastly, as at an invisible shape, speaks in
a horrified whisper.*

There he stands behind you now! — The human
beast, that goes to its horrible pleasure as not
even a wild animal will go — *in pack, in pack!*

Ghent, stung beyond endurance, rises and paces up and down. Ruth continues in a broken tone, spent by the violence of her own words.

I have tried — O, you don't know how I have tried to save myself from these thoughts. — While we were poor and struggling I thought I could do it. — Then — (*she points toward the cañon*) — then that hole down there began belching its stream of gold. You began to load me with gifts — to force easy ways upon me —

GHENT.

Well, what else did I care to make money for?

Ruth does not answer for a moment, then speaks slowly, taking the words with loathing upon her tongue.

RUTH.

Every time you give me anything, or talk about the mine and what it is going to do, there rings in my ears that dreadful sneer: "A dirt-eating Mojave would pay more than that for his squaw!"

She rises, lifting her arms.

I held myself so dear! And you bought me for a handful of gold, like a woman of the street!

You drove me before you like an animal from the market!

Ghent has seated himself again, elbows on knees and face in his hands. Ruth takes slowly from her bosom the nugget chain and holds it crumpled up in her palm. Her tone is quiet, almost matter-of-fact.

I have got back the chain again.

GHENT.

Looks up.

Chain? — What chain?

RUTH.

In the same tone, as she holds it up, letting it unwind.

The one you bought me with.

GHENT.

Dumfounded.

Where the devil —? Has that fellow been around here?

RUTH.

It would have had no meaning for me except from his hand.

GHENT.

So that 's what you 've been dōing with this rug-weaving and basket-making tomfoolery?

Ruth does not answer, but continues looking at the chain, running it through her fingers and weighing it in her hand.

How long has this been going on?

RUTH.

How long? — How long can one live without breathing? Two minutes? A few lifetimes? How long!

GHENT.

It was about a month after we came here that you began to potter with this work.

RUTH.

Draws her hand about her neck as if loosening something there; convulsively.

Since then this has been round my neck, around my limbs, a chain of eating fire. Link by link I have unwound it. You will never know what it has cost me, but I have paid it all. Take it and let me go free.

She tries to force it upon him, with wailing entreaty.

Take it, take it, I beseech you!

GHENT.

Holding himself under stern control.

You are killing yourself. You must n't go on this way. Go and rest. We will talk of this to-morrow.

RUTH.

Rest! To-morrow! O, how little you have understood of all I have said! I know it is only a symbol — a make-believe. I know I am childish to ask it. Still, take it and tell me I am free.

Ghent takes the chain reluctantly, stands for a moment looking at it, then speaks with iron firmness.

GHENT.

As you say, your price has risen. This is not enough.

He throws the chain about her neck and draws her to him by it.

You are mine, mine, do you hear? Now and forever!

He starts toward the house. She holds out her hand blindly to detain him.

RUTH.

In a stifled voice.

Wait! There is — something else.

He returns to her, anxiously, and stands waiting. She goes on, touching the chain.

It is n't only for my sake I ask you to take this off me, nor only for your sake. There is — another life — to think of.

GHENT.

Leaning to look into her averted face.

Ruth! — Is it true? — Thank God!

RUTH.

Now will you take this off me?

GHENT.

Starts to do so, then draws back.

No. Now less than ever. For now, more than ever, you are mine.

RUTH.

But — *how* yours? O, remember, have pity! *How* yours?

Philip appears at the head of the cañon path. Hcaring their voices, he waits, half concealed.

GHENT.

No matter how! Bought if you like, but mine!

Mine by blind chance and the hell in a man's veins, if you like! Mine by almighty Nature whether you like it or not!

RUTH.

Nature! Almighty Nature!

She takes the chain slowly from her neck.

Not yours! By everything my people have held sacred!

She drops the chain.

Not yours! Not yours!

She turns slowly. Philip has come forward, and supports her as she sinks half fainting upon his neck.

PHILIP.

To Ghent.

I came back to get my sister for the night. — I don't know by what ugly spell you have held her, but I know, from her own lips, that it is broken.

To Ruth.

Come! I have horses below.

GHENT.

No!

PHILIP.

Measuring him.

Yes.

Pause.

GHENT.

Let her say!

RUTH.

Looks long at Ghent, then at the house and surroundings. At last she turns to her brother.

Take me — with you. Take me — home!

Philip, supporting her, leads her down the cañon path. Ghent stands gazing after them as they disappear below the rim. He picks up the chain and goes back, looking down after the descending figures. The sunset light has faded, and darkness has begun to settle over the mountain world.

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

Sitting-room of Mrs. Jordan's house at Milford Corners, Massachusetts. An old-fashioned New England interior, faded but showing signs of former distinction. The walls are hung with family portraits, several in clerical attire of the eighteenth century, one in the uniform of the Revolutionary War. Doors open right and left. At the back is a fireplace, flanked by windows, the curtains of which are drawn. On the left is a small table, with a lamp, books, and magazines; on the right, near the fireplace, a sewing-table, with lamp and sewing-basket. A bookcase and a writing-desk occupy opposite corners of the room, forward.

Winthrop and Philip stand near the desk, chatting. Polly is reading a newspaper at the table, left. Ruth sits before the grate, sewing; her face is turned away toward the fire.

PHILIP.

Offers Winthrop his cigar-case.

Have another cigar.

WINTHROP.

Well, as a celebration.

Takes one and lights it.

PHILIP.

Rather small business for the Jordan family, to be celebrating a bare escape from the poor-house.

WINTHROP.

Where did you scare up the benevolent uncle? I never heard of him before.

PHILIP.

Nor I, scarcely. He 's always lived abroad.

Winthrop, strolling about, peeps over Polly's shoulder.

WINTHROP.

To Philip, with a scandalized gesture.

Stock reports!

PHILIP.

Her latest craze.

WINTHROP.

Last week it was Japanese Samurai.

POLLY.

Crushingly.

And next week it will be — Smart Alecks.

The door on the left opens, and Mrs. Jordan enters, with Dr. Newbury. During the preceding conversation Ruth has sat sewing, paying no heed to the chatter. Mrs. Jordan and the doctor look at her as they come in, but she does not look up.

MRS. JORDAN.

Sit down, Doctor, at least for a moment.

DR. NEWBURY.

Seats himself, Mrs. Jordan near him.

I can never resist such an invitation, in this house.

MRS. JORDAN.

Dear Doctor, you've been a wonderful friend to me and mine all these years, since poor Josiah was taken.

DR. NEWBURY.

But just when you needed help most —

MRS. JORDAN.

I know how gladly you would have offered it, if you could.

DR. NEWBURY.

Your brother-in-law in England was able to redeem the property?

MRS. JORDAN.

Hastily.

Yes, yes. — But what we are to do for the future, with my little capital gone —

She speaks lower.

O, that dreadful West! If my children had only stayed where they were born and bred.

She glances at Ruth, who has let her sewing fall in her lap and sits staring into the fire.

DR. NEWBURY.

Sotto voce.

Poor child!

Polly looks up from the newspaper excitedly, holding her finger at a place on the sheet.

POLLY.

I say, Phil! Win! Look here.

Philip and Winthrop, who have been chatting and smoking apart, come to the table.

PHILIP.

What is it now?

POLLY.

Tapping on the paper.

Something about your Arizona scheme.

PHILIP.

Bending over her, reads :

“Alleghany pig-iron, 93¾, National Brick —

POLLY.

Pointing.

No, there!

PHILIP.

Arizona Cactus Fibre, 84.

He picks up the paper, astounded.

Cactus Fibre listed! Selling at 84!

He tosses the paper to Winthrop.

This is the last straw!

MRS. JORDAN.

Who has been listening anxiously.

What does it mean, Phil?

PHILIP.

Only that the people who bought our plant and patents for a song, have made a fortune out of them.

Ruth has resumed her needle-work. Winthrop offers her the paper, with his finger at the line. She takes it, looks at it vaguely, and lays it on the table.

POLLY.

Leaning across.

Does n't that interest you?

RUTH.

Tonelessly.

O, yes.

She rises, lays her work aside, and goes toward the door, left.

DR. NEWBURY.

As she passes him.

Won't you bid me good-night, my child?

RUTH.

Giving him her hand.

Good-night, Doctor.

DR. NEWBURY.

Shaking his finger.

Remember, no more moping! And from to-morrow, outdoors with you

Ruth looks at him vacantly, attempting to smile. She moves toward the door, which Winthrop opens for her.

WINTHROP.

Holding out his hand.

You must bid me good-night, too, and good-bye.

RUTH.

With a faint kindling of interest.

Are you going away?

WINTHROP.

Only back to Boston. Some time, when you are stronger, you will come down and see our new sailors' hospital.

RUTH.

Yes. — Good-bye.

She goes out, Winthrop closing the door.

WINTHROP.

To Dr. Newbury.

I must be going along, father. Good-night, everybody!

Patting Philip's shoulder.

Hard luck, old man!

He goes out by the hall door on the right, Philip accompanying him.

DR. NEWBURY.

Looking after his son.

Brave boy! Brave boy! He keeps up a good show.

MRS. JORDAN.

You think he still grieves over her?

DR. NEWBURY.

Ah, poor chap! He's made of the right stuff, if he is mine.

MRS. JORDAN.

Let us not talk of it. It is too sad, too dreadful.

Philip reënters.

DR. NEWBURY.

About part of it we must talk.

He speaks so as to include Philip and Polly in the conversation.

Mrs. Jordan, I don't want to alarm you, but your daughter — I may as well put it bluntly — is in a dangerous state.

MRS. JORDAN.

Frightened.

Doctor! I thought she seemed so much stronger.

DR. NEWBURY.

She is, so far as her body is concerned.

Mrs. Jordan sits in an attitude of nervous attention, gazing at the doctor as if trying to formulate one of many questions pressing upon her. Philip comes forward and sits by the table, near them.

PHILIP.

Don't you think that the routine of life which she has taken up will soon restore her to a normal state of mind?

DR. NEWBURY.

Perhaps. — I hope so. — I would have good hope

of it, if it were not for her attitude toward her child.

MRS. JORDAN.

Overwhelmed.

You have noticed that, too! I have n't spoken to you of it, because — I have n't been willing to see it myself.

PHILIP.

I can't see that there is anything particularly strange in her attitude. She takes care of the brat scrupulously enough.

POLLY.

Brat!

MRS. JORDAN.

Brat!

To Dr. Newbury, after a reproachful gaze at Philip.

With the most watchful, the minutest care, but — (*she speaks in a constrained voice, with a nervous glance at the door*) — exactly as if it were a piece of machinery! — Phil, do please lay down that paper-knife before you break it! Your father brought that to me from India.

He obeys, but picks it up again absent-mindedly, after a few seconds.

Pardon me, Doctor. She goes about her daily business, and answers when she is spoken to, but as for her really being here —

She breaks out.

Doctor, what *shall* we do?

DR. NEWBURY.

She must be roused from this state, but how to do it, I don't know.

POLLY.

Rising, with heightened color and nervous emphasis.

Well, I do!

MRS. JORDAN.

Looking at her with frightened interrogation.

Polly —?

POLLY

What she needs is her husband, and I have sent for him!

PHILIP.

Inarticulate with surprise and anger.

You —!

POLLY.

Yes, I. He's been here a week. And he's an angel, is n't he, mother?

Philip snaps the paper-knife in two, flings the pieces to the floor, and rises, pale with rage.

MRS. JORDAN.

Gathering up the pieces with a wail.

O Phil! How could you! One of my most precious relics!

PHILIP.

To Mrs. Jordan.

Is this true, or is it another of her tedious jokes?

POLLY.

Protesting.

O, my dear, tedious!

MRS. JORDAN.

Wipes her eyes, after ruefully fitting the broken pieces of the knife together and laying them tenderly on the table.

You don't deserve to have me answer you, but it is true.

PHILIP.

Was this action taken with your knowledge?

MRS. JORDAN.

I do not expect to be spoken to in that tone. Polly telegraphed merely the facts. He came at his own instance.

PHILIP.

But you have consented to enter into relations with him?

MRS. JORDAN.

I have seen him several times.

POLLY.

Triumphantly.

And yesterday we showed him the baby! Such fun, was n't it, mother?

MRS. JORDAN.

Wiping her eyes, sheepishly.

Yes, it was rather — enjoyable.

PHILIP.

He can't be in this town. I should have heard of it.

POLLY.

We 've hid him safe.

PHILIP.

Where?

POLLY.

Never mind. He's on tap, and the sooner we turn on the spigot the better, is what I think. Doctor, what do you think?

DR. NEWBURY.

Let me ask you again to state your view of Ruth's case. I don't think I quite grasp your view.

POLLY.

Pluming herself, doctrinaire.

Well! Here on the one hand is the primitive, the barbaric woman, falling in love with a romantic stranger, who, like some old Viking on a harry, cuts her with his two-handed sword from the circle of her kinsmen, and bears her away on his dragon ship toward the midnight sun. Here on the other hand is the derived, the civilized woman, with a civilized nervous system, observing

that the creature eats bacon with his bowie knife, knows not the manicure, has the conversation of a preoccupied walrus, the instincts of a jealous caribou, and the endearments of a dancing crab in the mating season.

MRS. JORDAN.

Polly! What ideas! What language!

DR. NEWBURY.

Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Jordan. The vocabulary has changed since our day, and — the point of view has shifted a little.

To Polly.

Well?

POLLY.

Well, Ruth is one of those people who can't live in a state of divided feeling. She sits staring at this cleavage in her life, like — like that man in Dante, don't you know, who is pierced by the serpent, and who stands there in hell staring at his wound, yawning like a sleepy man.

MRS. JORDAN.

O, Polly, do please try not to get our heads muddled up with literature!

POLLY.

All I mean is that when she married her man she married him for keeps. And he did the same by her.

Philip rises, with uncontrollable impatience, and goes back to the mantelpiece, against which he leans, nervously tearing a bit of paper to pieces.

DR. NEWBURY.

Don't you think that a mere difference of cultivation, polish — or — or something of that sort — is rather small to have led to a rupture, and so painful a one too?

POLLY.

A little nonplussed.

Well, yes, perhaps it does *look* small. But we don't know the particulars; and men *are* such *colossal* brutes, you know, dear Doctor!

DR. NEWBURY.

Judicially.

Yes, so they are, so they are!

POLLY.

And then her pride! You know when it comes

to pride, Ruth would make Lucifer look like a charity-boy asking for more soup.

DR. NEWBURY.

I think perhaps the plan should be tried.

After a pause.

Yes, I think so decidedly.

PHILIP.

I call this a plot against her dignity and peace of mind!

DR. NEWBURY.

Rising.

Well, this conspirator must be going.

He shakes hands with Polly and Mrs. Jordan, takes his hat and stick. Philip remains plunged in angry reflection. Dr. Newbury taps Philip jestingly on the shoulder with the tip of his cane.

When you have lived as long as I have, my boy, you'll — you'll be just as old as I am!

He goes out, Polly accompanying him to the door.

Philip, disregarding his mother's conciliatory look and gesture as he passes her, goes out left. Polly stretches her arms and draws a deep breath as the door closes after him.

MRS. JORDAN.

Looking at her severely.

Pray what does that mean?

POLLY.

O, Phil is such a walking thunder-cloud, these days. It's a relief to get rid of him.

MRS. JORDAN.

Have you done what you could to make his life brighter?

POLLY.

I never had a chance. He has always been too much wrapped up in Ruth to think of me.

MRS. JORDAN.

How can you say such a thing? What do you suppose he married you for?

POLLY.

Heaven knows! What do they ever do it for? It is a most curious and savage propensity. But immensely interesting to watch.

MRS. JORDAN.

With a despairing gesture.

If you hold such heathenish views, why are you so bent on bringing those two together?

POLLY.

Soberly.

Because they represent — what Philip and I have missed.

MRS. JORDAN.

And pray what have “Philip and I” missed?

POLLY.

O, we’re all right. But we’re not like those two.

MRS. JORDAN.

I should hope not!

POLLY.

Even I believe that now and then a marriage is made in Heaven. This one was. They are predestined lovers!

MRS. JORDAN.

Mournfully, hypnotized by the evangelical note.

I pray it may be so.

She looks suspiciously at Polly.

You wretched girl! Predestined lovers and marriage made in Heaven, after all you've just been saying about how impossible he is.

POLLY.

He is quite impossible, but he's the kind we can't resist, any of us. He'd only have to crook his little finger at me.

MRS. JORDAN.

Lifting her hands in despair.

What are you young women coming to!

Pause.

He seems to me a good man.

POLLY.

Delighted.

O, he's *good*! So is a volcano between eruptions. And commonplace, too, until you happen to get a glimpse down one of the old volcanic rifts in

his surface, and see — far below — underneath the cold lava-beds — fire, fire, the molten heart of a continent!

MRS. JORDAN.

I only hope you have some vague general notion of what you are talking about.

POLLY.

Amen. — And now let's consider when, where, and how we are to hale this dubious pair together.

MRS. JORDAN

One thing is sure, it must n't be here.

POLLY.

Why not?

MRS. JORDAN.

On Philip's account.

POLLY.

O, bother Philip! — Was n't that the doorbell?

MRS. JORDAN.

Yes. You had better go.

Polly goes out. After a moment she reënters, excitedly.

POLLY.

It's Mr. Ghent!

MRS. JORDAN.

Amazed.

Mr. Ghent?

Polly nods enthusiastically. Ghent enters. He is conventionally dressed, a black string tie and the broad-brimmed hat which he carries being the only suggestions of Western costume remaining. Mrs. Jordan receives him in a flutter of excitement and alarm.

Mr. Ghent —! Surely at this hour —!

GHENT.

I beg your pardon. There was no other way. I am going West to-night. — Can I see you alone?

MRS. JORDAN.

Looks at Polly, who goes out, pouting.

Going West to-night?

GHENT.

Yes. Trouble at the mine.

MRS. JORDAN.

Is n't your business partner competent to attend to it?

GHEENT.

He's competent to steal the whole outfit. In fact, is doing it, or has done it already.

MRS. JORDAN.

Vaguely alarmed.

And — my property here? Is that involved in the danger?

GHEENT.

Certainly not.

MRS. JORDAN.

Relieved.

I have gone through such months of misery at the thought of losing the dear old place! — If Ruth only knew that we owe the very roof over our heads to you —

GHEENT.

Well, she is n't to know, that 's understood, is n't it? Besides, it 's nothing to speak of. Glad if you think it a service. She would n't.

MRS. JORDAN.

You mean —?

GHENT.

I mean that if she knew about it, she would n't stay here overnight.

MRS. JORDAN.

Sit down.

She motions him to a seat at the table; she sits near him, speaking with nervous impulsiveness.

Tell me what is the trouble between you! It has all been a dreadful mystery from the beginning!

GHENT.

Is it a mystery that a woman like your daughter —?

He stops and sinks into gloomy thought.

MRS. JORDAN.

Should have chosen you? — Pardon me, I don't mean anything unkind —

He makes a gesture of brusque exoneration.

But having chosen — and broken faith with her brother to do it —

GHENT.

Nervously.

Let's drop that!

Pause.

Mrs. Jordan, you come of the old stock. Do you believe in the devil?

MRS. JORDAN.

Perhaps not in the sense you mean.

GHENT.

Tapping his breast.

I mean the devil inside of a man — the devil in the heart!

MRS. JORDAN.

O, yes. We are all forced by our lives to believe in that.

GHENT.

Our lives!

He looks slowly round the room.

How long have you lived here?

MRS. JORDAN.

For thirty years, in this house. Before I was married I lived in the old house down the road yonder, opposite the church.

GHENT.

To himself.

Think of it!

MRS. JORDAN.

What did you say?

GHENT.

Gathers himself together.

Mrs. Jordan, I want you to promise that what I put in your hands from time to time comes to your daughter as if from another source.

MRS. JORDAN.

You are going away for good?

GHENT.

Yes.

MRS. JORDAN.

You give her up?

GHENT.

A man can't give up what is n't his.

MRS. JORDAN.

What is n't his? She is your wife.

GHEENT.

No. Never has been.

MRS. JORDAN.

Terrified.

O, pitiful heavens!

GHEENT.

-I beg your pardon. — I was only trying to say — I used to think that when a couple was married, there they were, man and wife, and that was the end of it. I used to think that when they had a child, well, sure enough it was their child, and all said. — And there's something in that, too.

He stares before him, smiting the table and speaking with low intensity.

Damn me if there ain't something eternal in it!

He sits for a moment more in gloomy thought.

Do you think she 'll make up to the young one, after a bit?

MRS. JORDAN.

O, surely! To think otherwise would be too dreadful!

GHENT.

I'd give a good deal to know. — It's kind of lonesome for the little rooster, sitting out there all by himself on the world's doorstep! — I must see her for a minute before I go. — Do your best for me.

MRS. JORDAN.

I will do what I can.

GHENT.

You can put it as a matter of business. There is a matter of business I want to talk over with her, if I can get up the gumption.

MRS. JORDAN.

Had n't you better tell me what it is?

GHENT.

Well, it's about your son Philip. That little scheme he started out in my country — the Cactus Fibre industry.

MRS. JORDAN.

Yes?

GHENT.

I believe he thinks his sister's going away when she did queered his game.

MRS. JORDAN.

It was a severe blow to him in every way. She was the life and soul of his enterprise.

GHENT.

I want her to give him back the Cactus Fibre outfit, worth something more than when he dropped it.

MRS. JORDAN.

Give it back to him? She?

GHENT.

Takes papers from his pocket.

Yes. I happened to hear it was knocking around for nothing in the market, and I bought it — for the house, really. Hated to see that go to the dogs. Then I looked over the plant, and got a hustler to boom it. I thought as a matter of transfer, to cancel her debt, or what she thinks her debt —

Pause.

MRS. JORDAN.

Fingering the paper with hesitation.

Mr. Ghent, we really can't accept such a thing.
Your offer is quixotic.

GHEENT.

Quix — what?

MRS. JORDAN.

Quixotic, it really is.

GHEENT.

Doubtfully.

I guess you're right. It depends on the way you look at it. One way it looks like a pure business proposition — so much lost, so much made good. The other way it looks, as you say, quix — um —. Anyway, there are the papers! Do what you think best with them.

He lays the papers on the table, and picks up his hat.

MRS. JORDAN.

Wait in the parlor.

He opens the hall door.

The second door on the left.

With an awkward bow to Mrs. Jordan, he partly closes

the door after him, when the inner door opens and Ruth appears. She goes to the sewing-table and picks up her sewing. Her mother, with a frightened glance at the half-open hall door, draws her back and kisses her. Ghent, unseen by Ruth, remains standing, with his hand on the door-knob.

MRS. JORDAN.

Ruth, you are a brave girl, and I will treat you like one. — Your husband is here.

RUTH.

Here? — Where?

Ghent pushes the door open, and closes it behind him. Ruth, sinking back against the opposite wall, stares at him blankly.

MRS. JORDAN.

He is leaving for the West again to-night. He has asked to see you before he goes.

Ruth covers her face with her hands, then fumbles blindly for the latch of the door. Her mother restrains her.

It is your duty to hear what he has to say. You owe that to the love you once bore him.

RUTH.

He killed my love before it was born!

MRS. JORDAN.

It is your duty to hear him, and part with him in a Christian spirit, for our sakes, if not for your own.

RUTH.

For whose sake?

MRS. JORDAN.

For mine, and your brother's. — We owe it to him, as a family.

GHENT.

Raises his hand restrainingly.

Mrs. Jordan —!

RUTH.

Owe?

MRS. JORDAN.

We owe it to him, for what he has done and wishes to do.

RUTH.

What he has done? — Wishes to do?

MRS. JORDAN.

Yes, don't echo me like a parrot! He has done a

great deal for us, and is anxious to do more, if you will only let him.

RUTH.

What is this? Explain it to me quickly.

MRS. JORDAN.

With growing impatience.

Don't think to judge your mother!

RUTH.

I demand to hear what all this is! Tell me.

MRS. JORDAN.

Losing control of herself.

He has kept us from being turned into the street!

Ghent, who has tried dumbly to restrain her, turns away in stoic resignation to his fate.

He has given us the very roof over our heads!

RUTH.

You said that uncle —

MRS. JORDAN.

Well, it was not your uncle! I said so to shield you in your stubborn and cold-hearted pride.

RUTH.

Is there more of this?

MRS. JORDAN.

Yes, there *is* more. You wronged your brother to follow your own path of wilful love, and now you wrong him again by following your own path of wilful aversion. Here comes your husband, offering to make restitution —

RUTH.

What restitution?

MRS. JORDAN.

He has bought Philip's property out there, and wants you to give it back to him.

Ruth stands motionless for a moment, then looks vacantly about, speaking in a dull voice, as at first.

RUTH.

I must go away from this house.

MRS. JORDAN.

You don't understand. He claims nothing. He is going away himself immediately. Whatever

this dreadful trouble is between you, you are his wife, and he has a right to help you and yours.

RUTH.

I am not his wife.

MRS. JORDAN.

Ruth, don't frighten me. He said those same words —

RUTH.

He said — what?

MRS. JORDAN.

That you were not his wife.

RUTH.

He said — that?

MRS. JORDAN.

Yes, but afterward he explained —

RUTH.

Flaming into white wrath.

Explained! Did he explain that when I was left alone that night at the ranch he came — with

two others — and when gun and knife had failed me, and nothing stood between me and their drunken fury, I sold myself to the strongest of them, hiding my head behind the name of marriage? Did he explain that between him and the others money clinked — (*she raps on the table*) — my price in hard money on the table? And now that I have run away to the only refuge I have on earth, he comes to buy the very house where I have hidden, and every miserable being within it!

Long pause. She looks about blankly and sinks down by the table.

MRS. JORDAN.

Cold and rigid.

And you — married him — after that?

She turns away in horror-stricken judgment.

You ought to have — died — first!

Philip opens the door and enters, staring at Ghent with dislike and menace.

O Philip, she has told me! — You can't imagine what horrors!

Ruth rises, with fright in her face, and approaches her brother to restrain him.

PHILIP.

Horrors? What horrors?

MRS. JORDAN.

It was your fault! You ought never to have left her alone in that dreadful place! She — she married him — to save herself — from — O horrible!

Philip waits an instant, the truth penetrating his mind slowly. Then, with mortal rage in his face, he starts toward Ghent.

PHILIP.

You — dog!

Ruth throws herself in Philip's path.

RUTH.

No, no, no!

PHILIP.

Get out of my way. This is my business now.

RUTH.

No, it is mine. I tell you it is mine.

PHILIP.

We 'll see whose it is. I said that if the truth ever

came out, this man should answer to me, and now, by God, he shall answer!

With another access of rage he tries to thrust Ruth from his path. Mrs. Jordan, terrified at the storm she has raised, clings desperately to her son's arm.

RUTH.

I told him long ago it should be between us. Now it shall be between us.

MRS. JORDAN.

Philip! For my sake, for your father's sake! Don't, don't! You will only make it worse. In pity's name, leave them alone together. Leave them alone — together!

They force Philip back to the door, where he stands glaring at Ghent.

PHILIP.

To Ghent.

My time will come. Meanwhile, hide behind the skirts of the woman whose life you have ruined and whose heart you have broken. Hide behind her. It is the coward's privilege. Take it.

Philip, with Mrs. Jordan still clinging to his arm, goes out, Ruth closing the door after them. She and Ghent

confront each other in silence for a moment, across the width of the room.

RUTH.

God forgive me! You never can.

GHENT.

It was a pity — but — you were in a corner. I drove you to it, by coming here.

RUTH.

It was base of me — base!

GHENT.

The way your mother took it showed me one thing. — I've never understood you, because — I don't understand your people.

RUTH.

You mean — her saying I ought to have died rather than accept life as I did?

GHENT.

Yes.

RUTH.

She spoke the truth. I have always seen it.

GHENT.

Ruth, it 's a queer thing for me to be saying, but — it seems to me, you 've never seen the truth between us.

RUTH.

What is the truth — between us?

GHENT.

The truth is —

He pauses, then continues with a disconsolate gesture.

Well, there 's no use going into that.

He fumbles in his pocket, and takes from it the nugget chain, which he looks at in silence for a time, then speaks in quiet resignation.

I 've got here the chain, that 's come, one way and another, to have a meaning for us. For you it 's a bitter meaning, but, all the same, I want you to keep it. Show it some day to the boy, and tell him — about me.

He lays it on the desk and goes toward the door.

RUTH.

What is the truth — between us?

GHENT.

I guess it was only of myself I was thinking.

RUTH.

What is it — about yourself?

GHENT.

After a pause.

I drifted into one of your meeting-houses last Sunday, not knowing where else to go, and I heard a young fellow preaching about what he called "The Second Birth." A year and a half ago I should have thought it was all hocus-pocus, but you can believe me or not, the way he went on he might have been behind the door that night in that little justice den at San Jacinto, saying to the Recording Angel: "Do you see that rascal? Take notice! There ain't an ounce of bone or a drop of blood in him but what 's new man!"

RUTH.

You think it has been all my fault — the failure we've made of our life?

GHENT.

It 's been no failure. However it is, it 's been our life, and in my heart I think it 's been — all — right!

RUTH.

All right! O, how can you say that?

She repeats the words with a touch of awe and wonder.

All right!

GHENT.

Some of it has been wrong, but as a whole it has been right — right! I know that does n't happen often, but it has happened to us, because — (*he stops, unable to find words for his idea*) because — because the first time our eyes met, they burned away all that was bad in our meeting, and left only the fact that we *had* met — pure good — pure joy — a fortune of it — for both of us. Yes, for both of us! You 'll see it yourself some day.

RUTH.

If you had only heard my cry to you, to wait, to cleanse yourself and me — by suffering and sacrifice — before we dared begin to live! But

you would n't see the need! — O, if you could have felt for yourself what I felt for you! If you could have said, "The wages of sin is death!" and suffered the anguish of death, and risen again purified! But instead of that, what you had done fell off from you like any daily trifle.

GHENT.

Steps impulsively nearer her, sweeping his hand to indicate the portraits on the walls.

Ruth, it's these fellows are fooling you! It's they who keep your head set on the wages of sin, and all that rubbish. What have we got to do with suffering and sacrifice? That may be the law for some, and I've tried hard to see it as our law, and thought I had succeeded. But I have n't! Our law is joy, and selfishness; the curve of your shoulder and the light on your hair as you sit there says that as plain as preaching. — Does it gall you the way we came together? You asked me that night what brought me, and I told you whiskey, and sun, and the devil. Well, I tell you now I'm thankful on my knees for all three! Does it rankle in your mind that I took you when I could get you, by main strength and fraud? I guess most good women are taken that way, if

they only knew it. Don't you want to be paid for? I guess every wife is paid for in some good coin or other. And as for you, I've paid for you not only with a trumpery chain, but with the heart in my breast, do you hear? That's one thing you can't throw back at me — the man you've made of me, the life and the meaning of life you've showed me the way to!

Ruth's face is hidden in her hands, her elbows on the table. He stands over her, flushed and waiting. Gradually the light fades from his face. When he speaks again, the ring of exultation which has been in his voice is replaced by a sober intensity.

If you can't see it my way, give me another chance to live it out in yours.

He waits, but she does not speak or look up. He takes a package of letters and papers from his pocket, and runs them over, in deep reflection.

During the six months I've been East —

RUTH.

Looking up.

Six months? Mother said a week!

GHEENT.

Your sister-in-law's telegram was forwarded to

me here. I let her think it brought me, but as a matter of fact, I came East in the next train after yours. It was rather a low-lived thing to do, I suppose, hanging about and bribing your servant for news —

Ruth lets her head sink in her hands. He pauses and continues ruefully.

I might have known how that would strike you! Well, it would have come out sooner or later. — That's not what I started to talk about. — You ask me to suffer for my wrong. Since you left me I *have* suffered — God knows! You ask me to make some sacrifice. Well — how would the mine do? Since I've been away they've as good as stolen it from me. I could get it back easy enough by fighting; but supposing I don't fight. Then we'll start all over again, just as we stand in our shoes, and make another fortune — for our boy.

Ruth utters a faint moan as her head sinks in her arms on the table. With trembling hands, Ghent caresses her hair lightly, and speaks between a laugh and a sob.

Little mother! Little mother! What does the past matter, when we've got the future — and him?

Ruth does not move. He remains bending over her for some moments, then straightens up, with a gesture of stoic despair.

I know what you're saying there to yourself, and I guess you're right. Wrong is wrong, from the moment it happens till the crack of doom, and all the angels in Heaven, working overtime, can't make it less or different by a hair. That seems to be the law. I've learned it hard, but I guess I've learned it. I've seen it written in mountain letters across the continent of this life. — Done is done, and lost is lost, and smashed to hell is smashed to hell. We fuss and potter and patch up. You might as well try to batter down the Rocky Mountains with a rabbit's heart-beat!

He goes to the door, where he turns.

You've fought hard for me, God bless you for it. — But it's been a losing game with you from the first! — You belong here, and I belong out yonder — beyond the Rockies, beyond — the Great Divide!

He opens the door and is about to pass out. Ruth looks up with streaming eyes.

RUTH.

Wait!

He closes the door and stands waiting for her to speak.

*Ruth masters herself and goes on, her eyes shining,
her face exalted.*

Tell me you know that if I could have followed you, and been your wife, without struggle and without bitterness, I would have done it.

GHENT.

Solemnly.

I believe you would.

RUTH.

Tell me you know that when I tore down with bleeding fingers the life you were trying to build for us, I did it only — because — I loved you!

GHENT.

Comes slowly to the table, looking at her with bewilderment.

How was that?

RUTH.

O, I don't wonder you ask! Another woman would have gone straight to her goal. You might have found such a one. But instead you found

me, a woman in whose ears rang night and day the cry of an angry Heaven to us both — “Cleanse yourselves!” And I went about doing it in the only way I knew — (*she points at the portraits on the wall*) — the only way my fathers knew — by wretchedness, by self-torture, by trying blindly to pierce your careless heart with pain. And all the while you — O, as I lay there and listened to you, I realized it for the first time — you had risen, in one hour, to a wholly new existence, which flooded the present and the future with brightness, yes, and reached back into our past, and made of it — made of all of it — something to cherish!

She takes the chain, and comes closer.

You have taken the good of our life and grown strong. I have taken the evil and grown weak, weak unto death. Teach me to live as you do!

She puts the chain about her neck.

GHENT.

Puzzled, not yet realizing the full force of her words.

Teach you — to live — as I do?

RUTH.

And teach — *him!*

GHENT.

Unable to realize his fortune.

You 'll let me help make a kind of a happy life
for — the little rooster?

RUTH.

Holds out her arms, her face flooded with happiness.

And for us! For us!

CURTAIN

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